

Beyond the Myth of a Single bloc: Alliance Formation among the Divergent Religious Parties of Pakistan during the 1970s

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Abstract

This paper examines an entrenched assumption that religious parties of Pakistan during 1970s constituted a monolith and a cohesive bloc against Z.A Bhutto, popularly known as religious parties' vs Bhutto. However, this assumption misses nuances of the complex alliances of the religious parties against Bhutto. Despite their irreconcilable differences and inherent contradictions, the religious parties built strategic alliances against Bhutto primarily as an imperative of political survival and contingent political milieu. The paper argues that the formation of political alliances was driven by a shared imperative of survival rather than ideological affiliations and convergences. Using previously untapped sources, including party literature, vernacular digests and newspapers, the paper employs a contingency based framework embedded in the 'politics of survival'. It argues that the alliance building among the religious parties during 1970s could be better explained by shared perception of political threat, competing claim over religious constituencies and immediate and contingent political realities rather than an oversaturated explanation of ideological convergences.

Keyword: Religious Parties, Z. A Bhutto, Alliances, Single Bloc, Politics of Survival, Pakistan.

Introduction

Though the 1970s was a decade of democracy, it was also an era of turbulence, authoritarianism, religious populism and unusual alliances. Z.A Bhutto was a powerful Prime Minister whereas his opposition was relatively fragmented and fragile. Bhutto marginalized his opposition through authoritarian tactics whereas the

opposition struggled to cope with Bhutto's regime. More importantly, Bhutto's opposition particularly the religious parties such as Jamiate-Ulemae Islam (JUI), Jamiate-Ulemae Pakistan, and Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), was quite vocal against him on religious grounds which apparently gave an impression that religious parties were very strong and were perceived as a monolith and a cohesive political entity against Bhutto. This is why religious parties were politically, analytically and academically considered a monolith entity popularly known as Bhutto vs religious parties. Though this view does hold significance but lacks nuances which this paper tends to address. The paper argues that such a monolithic understanding is analytically misleading and fails to capture the internal nuances and tensions within religious political parties of Pakistan during the 1970s. This monolithic view of religious parties of Pakistan during the 1970s in an oversimplified and grand 'metanarrative' and an oversimplified and a grand conception which misses the nuances and localized context.¹ This is an academic and analytical mistake since it clearly overlooks the irreconcilable divergences among the religious parties. It also overlooks how and why the religious parties, with contrasting ideologies, contesting theological orientations, and with antagonistic feelings against each other, were forced to club together against Bhutto.

The central problem this paper addresses is; how did the divergent religious parties, with conflicting ideological and sectarian positions, come together to form political alliances against Bhutto? It is important to understand and analyze the differences among these religious parties to deconstruct the monolithic academic and analytical category and understand why they joined hands together, first in United Democratic Front (UDF) and later in the 1977 election and post-election Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) movement. It is important to discuss the nuances of this phenomenon because religious parties are usually treated as one monolithic category such as religious parties and the right-wing religious parties, particularly with reference to 1970s of Pakistan.

The religious parties set aside their extreme differences to counter Z. A Bhutto because he had already pushed them to the margins. This paper argues that alliance-formation among these parties was not primarily driven by ideological affinities but was shaped by political contingencies and a shared perception of threat and political survival. It was a matter of survival for the religious parties to build an alliance against Bhutto despite huge differences. The alliances were not merely ideological as they are usually understood, they were more strategic, survival strategies and contingent political actions. The paper moves beyond an over-simplified and a much

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

clichéd way of viewing religious parties as a monolithic entity and brings forth the nuances of the alliance building of religious parties during 1970s.

Methodology and Sources

A qualitative historical approach was adopted to study the alliances of three religious parties, JUI, JUP and JI during the 1970s. The party manifestos, speeches and statements of the leaders, newspapers and vernacular literature were rigorously examined. The paper focuses more on vernacular newspapers such as Amrooz, Musawat, Mashriq, Nawa-i-Waqt and digests such as Al-Fatah, Anwar-i-Raza, Jaha Numa, Manshoor, Nusrat, Pakistan Quarterly, Tarjuman ul Quran (JI) Tarjmaan-i-Islam (JUI). Some of these digests have previously been untapped. By closely analyzing these texts the paper traces how religious parties, despite their irreconcilable differences, clubbed together against Z. A Bhutto. It links empirical evidence with the broader argument of contingency and political survival.

A Brief History of Religious Parties

The emergence of religious parties in Pakistan during the mid-20th century marked a significant shift in the country's political landscape. Among these parties were Jamiate-Ulema-e Islam (JUI), Jamiate Ulama-e Pakistan, and Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), each with its distinct ideologies and objectives. During the Pakistan Movement, Jamiate Ulema-e-i-Hind adopted a pro Indian National Congress (INC) policy resulting in dissatisfaction among pro All India Muslim League (AIML) members and ulema which later formed the Jamiat-i-Ulema-e Islam (JUI) supporting the struggle of Pakistan.² Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani was the first president of the JUI.

Jamiat-i-Ulama-e Pakistan (JUP) represents the Barelvi school of thought, aimed to establish a true Islamic state and garnered support from Pirs,³ Mashaikh⁴, and landed elites. The Barelvis supported the Pakistan Movement and extended its support for All-India Muslim League (AIML) in gaining mass support. However, later on, the League developed a close relationship with the JUI, particularly with Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani who held a significant position within the party. This raised concerns among Barelvi ulema, leading them to reassess their political stance. Feeling frustrated, they criticized the ulema of JUI, labeling them as proponents of the ideology of Indian National Congress.⁵ Maulana Ahmad Saeed Kazmi's letter highlighted a strong desire to unite Barelvi ulema and form a new party.⁶ The quest for a unity among the Barelvis led to the establishment of the

² M. Rafique Afzal, *Political Parties in Pakistan 1947-1958* (Islamabad: NIHCR, 2018), 57

³ Muslim spiritual leaders

⁴ Refers to religious leaders especially associated with Sufi orders

⁵ Mujeeb Ahmed, *Jamiyyat Ulama-I-Pakistan, 1948-1979*. (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1993), 1.

⁶ Maulana Ahmed Saeed Kazmi "Maktoob-e-Khasosi." 4 March 1948. Multan

Jamiat-i-Ulema Pakistan in Multan, Punjab. Formally established on 28 March 1948, the Markazi Jamiat-i-ulamae Pakistan, previously the All-India Sunni Conference, elected Maulana Abul Hasanat Qadri as its first President and Maulana Ahmad Saeed Kazmi as its first Nazm-i-A'la.⁷ This was the first religious party formed after the creation of Pakistan, with the fundamental goal of establishing a true Islamic state. Despite facing fragmentation, particularly during the Ayub and Yahya regimes, the party remained united under the leadership of Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani.⁸

Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) is another religious party under-studied which was founded by Syed Abul Ala Maududi in 1941, is a revivalist religious party with a mission to reform society and politics according to the Islamic principles. The party focused on moral renewal of the Muslim society and political activism. Unlike nationalist movements, Jamaat-i-Islami seeks to promote universal Islamic ideals and enact changes across moral, political, economic, and social spheres globally. It promotes the concept of an Islamic state and emphasized on the importance of the Islamic system of government.⁹ It draws a clear distinction between Muslim nationalism and Islamic nationalism.¹⁰ Jamaat-i-Islami was critical of the narratives and ideologies like those of JUL. While it acknowledged democracy as compatible with Islamic principles, it highlighted significant disparities between Western and Islamic democracy.¹¹ It attracts people from lower middle classes, educational institutes and different professions.¹²

Theoretical Framework: Political Contingencies, Politics of Survival and Alliances between Divergent Political Forces

The differences among the religious parties were fundamentally religious, sectarian and ideological in nature. In many cases, these differences appeared deeply entrenched and are analytically irreconcilable. Yet despite these well-rooted divergences, religious parties successfully built political alliances during the 1970s against Bhutto. The two major anti-Bhutto alliances such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and later the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) emerged during the 1970s and both pursued political agendas.¹³ The UDF did have a religious content,

⁷ Mujeeb Ahmed, *JamiyyatUlama-I-Pakistan, 1948-1979*. (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1993), 2.

⁸ M. Rafique Afzal, *Political parties in Pakistan: 1969-1971*, 3. (National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad, 2018), 57.

⁹ Tarjamanu-ul-Quran, May 1973, Vol,79.no,3, 40.

¹⁰ Tarjamanu-ul-Quran, May 1973, Vol,79.no,3, 41

¹¹ Tarjamanu-ul-Quran, March 1977, Vol,87.no,1, 44.

¹² Bashir Ahmed, "The PNA'S movement," *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 31, no. 1 (2018): 37

¹³ United Democratic Front (UDF) was an alliance of Z.A Bhutto's opposition. Later the same parties formed another alliance Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) before the elections 1977.

but the PNA completely turned to be a religious movement with populist religious narratives and slogans. It clearly pursued a political agenda to counter Bhutto's politics whereas religion was used as a strategy to mobilize the masses.¹⁴ The parties of the PNA were ideologically heterogeneous and diverse which demonstrates that it was a loose and a contingent populist coalition with immediate political agenda, and religion was used to mobilize the masses against Bhutto.

A similar pattern can also be observed in the case of the UDF, which emerged during the early years of Bhutto's rule as an alliance designed primarily to negotiate political power and challenge Bhutto's growing authoritarian tendencies. Although leadership positions within the UDF were occupied by the religious figures, Mufti Mahmood (JUI) as President and Professor Ghafoor (JI) as Secretary General, the alliance still had a very clear political agenda.¹⁵ Religious demands were not central to the movement. In fact, Article 2-A represented only one among the eight demands advanced by the alliance, while the remaining demands were overwhelmingly political in character.¹⁶ This illustrates that the alliance was driven more by political contingencies rather than by purely religious aspirations.

The role of JUI, JI, and JUP in both alliances is analytically significant because these parties, despite their deep sectarian and ideological differences, remained at the forefront of anti-Bhutto politics. Interestingly, these parties did not limit themselves merely to alliances among religious actors, they even formed alliances with secular, centrist, and left-leaning political parties. This indicates that political contingencies proved more pervasive and politically decisive than ideologically rigid positions. Both the UDF and the PNA consisted of a significant number of secular and centrist parties, which underlines an important distinction between religious and sectarian differences and political alliances.

Religious and sectarian differences often appeared impossible to reconcile because they were rooted in doctrinal disputes extending far beyond immediate politics. Yet the same parties possessing opposing religious worldviews and ideological commitments were capable of building political alliances under a broader political agenda. Such alliances may therefore be better understood as strategic alliances or alliances shaped by the politics of survival. This paper conceptualizes these alliances as contingency-driven political arrangements in which ideological rigidity is temporarily suspended in response to shared political threats, political exclusion, and survival imperatives.

¹⁴ Rizwan Ullah Kokab and Muhammad Arif Khan, "Religious Motivation behind Political Movement: A Case Study of Nizam-e-Mustafa Movement," *Journal of Pakistan Vision* 19, no. 1 (2018):131.

¹⁵ Ulfat Zahra and Javed Iqbal. "Politics of alliances and its effects during Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's rule in Pakistan," *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)* 5, no. 1 (2021): 97.

¹⁶ Ibid. 97.

The researcher of this paper in his Ph.D dissertation, introduces the new concept of the ‘politics of survival’.¹⁷ The term ‘politics of survival’ refers to a critical political stage in which politics transforms into an “Either-Or” existential struggle. It signifies a condition where the political success of one force is increasingly perceived as dependent upon the marginalization, exclusion, or destruction of others. A political actor perceives the success of an opponent as their own ‘political extinction’ which temporarily suspends of long-standing ideological and sectarian differences. Under such circumstances, democratic negotiation, compromise, and political dialogue gradually diminish, while political actors increasingly resort to strategies that often transcend ideological, ethical and democratic boundaries. This was primarily triggered by Bhutto’s authoritarianism. Thus, the alliances of a religious parties stem from the fear within the Bhutto regime and a relational product of Bhutto’s authoritarian regime which forced a divergent forces to convergence as Michel Foucault rightly put ‘*where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power*’.¹⁸ The politics of survival generates extreme insecurities and distrust among political actors. In such situations, opposing political forces may temporarily set aside major ideological contradictions and cooperate against a common adversary in order to ensure their collective political survival. Political competition thus becomes existential in nature, where one actor’s survival is perceived as another actor’s decline or extinction. Such conditions can produce unusual political alignments, alliances and strategic cooperation among actors who otherwise remain deeply hostile toward one another.

The politics of the 1970s, particularly the conflict between Bhutto and right-wing religious parties, strongly exemplified this stage. Both Bhutto and the religious parties increasingly viewed each other through the lens of political survival. The relationship between them became characterized by profound insecurity, mutual distrust, ideological differences, and political confrontation. It was precisely this political environment that compelled religious parties standing at opposing sectarian and ideological poles to join hands against Bhutto by temporarily suspending many of their political, theological and sectarian antagonisms. The concept of the politics of survival helps explain how an intense political infighting can override ideological rigidity and produce strategic cooperation among contradictory political forces. This concept may be useful in theorizing alliances across the globe where politics remains highly contentious.

¹⁷ Abdul Sattar, Z. A. *Bhutto Regime and the Politics of Religious Parties: A Study of Punjab* (unpublished PhD diss., Department of History & Pakistan Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, 2025), 29.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 95.

The primary trigger in alliances of the parties may not be driven by ideological agenda but immediate points of convergence. This led parties to transcend their ideological position to form alliances. This may be led by a shared perception of threat and contingent political situations that demand loose coalitions beyond ideological spectrum. The alliance of religious parties against Bhutto parties during 1970s clearly reflect these features where Bhutto's opposition, especially the religious parties perceived Bhutto's authoritarianism and his religious populism as a threat to their politics. This forced them to suspend their divergences for a broader and a single political agenda. The religious parties were not monolithic entity; their agenda was monolithic for short span of time.

Charles Tilly's concept of the 'repertoire of contention' is another useful theoretical grid to understand alliance formation in an extremely contentious politics.¹⁹ Tilly argues that political actors possess multiple possible strategies of action, yet in practice they select from a limited range of strategies shaped by historical experience, political structures, and cultural contexts. Political actors also actively engage in framing processes through which they define their claims, construct collective identities, and identify political opponents in ways that facilitate mobilization and cooperation. This framework resonates strongly with the alliances formed through the UDF and PNA. The PNA's shift from a protest against rigging to the religious populism and rhetoric was a strategic selection from a culturally defined repertoire of religious performance.²⁰ The religious parties of the PNA strategically framed their movements as struggles for Islam and portrayed Bhutto as anti-religious. Such populist framing became an effective political strategy for mobilizing public support, constructing a shared oppositional identity, and legitimizing cooperation among otherwise divided actors. Bhutto was perceived and attributed by the religious parties as an existential threat for them which became a foundation for the alliance of these parties.²¹ The framing of Bhutto as a common enemy threatening both religion and political survival enabled religious parties to overcome many of their political and sectarian antagonisms, though temporarily and contingent. This framework also helps us understand that ideology is not a primary determinant of alliances, contingencies and political contingencies are the determinants of alliances. This explains much about how the religious parties, despite huge divergences, successfully formed alliances against Bhutto.

The alliances of religious parties during the 1970s should not be understood simply as manifestations of religious and ideological unity. Rather, they should be interpreted as historically contingent and politically strategic arrangements formed in context of authoritarian pressure, political insecurity, religious legitimacy and politics of survival. The concepts of political contingency, politics of survival, and

¹⁹ Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 16.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 48-49.

²¹ *Ibid*, 43.

repertoire of contention together provide an analytical framework through which the alliances among contrary political forces during the Bhutto era can be understood more clearly and more critically.

Points of Divergences among Religious Parties: Deoband, Barelvis and 'Maududiyat'

This segment thoroughly treats divergences among religious parties that were apparently irreconcilable. The religious parties such as JUP, JI, and JUI had entirely different historical trajectories, religious, and ideological orientations. They had serious conflicts and differences both in religion and politics. JI was relatively growing religious party but was not much opposed to JUI and JUP. It didn't have a sectarian orientation, yet its ideology contradicted with JUI and JUP primarily because of its criticism of conventional religious parties and having a revivalist agenda and orientation. It tended to become a vanguard of Islamic revolution by setting aside sectarian differences, though Maulana Maududi's writings had ignited both JUP and JUI. Though, he was not an alim²² in traditional sense.²³ He also did not attend a traditional *dar-al-'ulum*, yet by usurping the traditional role of the ulema, he was monopolizing religious thought.²⁴ This was not at all acceptable to traditional religious parties such as JUI and JUP. Maududi and his JI did not represent any sect and largely was part of a global current of Islamic revivalism. Though, it usually refrained from attacking the traditional parties and sects directly, but its ideology has a serious implication for the traditional parties which alarmed the traditional parties and created anxieties among them. Maududi had some friction with ulema even when he was working with them as an editor of Jamiat magazine.²⁵ He vehemently criticized ulema and opined that biggest reason of the decline in religion was the neglect of duty by the ulema, who involved themselves in partisan politics.²⁶ His ideas also attracted Muslim middle classes especially the young minds which also caused anxieties among the traditional religious parties such as JUP and JUI and they saw JI as their major contender on the monopoly over religious constituencies.

There was a huge resistance against JI both from JUI and JUP. On the other hand, JUP and JUI had clear differences on sectarian grounds. JUI and JUP, unlike JI, had clear sectarian orientations and historical animosities. JUP represented the

²² *Alim*: A Muslim religious scholar in traditional sense

²³ Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 80.

²⁴ William Kesler Jackson, *A Subcontinent's Sunni Schism: The Deobandi-Barelvi Rivalry and the Creation of Modern South Asia*, PhD diss. (Syracuse University, 2013), 383.

²⁵ Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*, 81.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 86.

Barelvi school of thought whereas JUI represented Deoband School of thought.²⁷ JUP claimed that it was the only religious party among the three that supported the cause of Pakistan whereas both JI and JUI opposed the idea of Pakistan. JUP was also very insecure by the growing influence of JI among the youth and middle classes and was critical of Maududi's ideologies. It also had a political context because JI was rapidly growing in Karachi, which was also the base camp of JUP. It's interesting to see that while JUP joined UDF, a front against Bhutto, there was a huge debate among the cadres of JUP about whether they should have joined the alliance with JI or not. This demonstrated how deep and sharp JUP's differences with JI were. The subsequent segments will look into the divergences among the religious parties in detail.

JUI and JI Differences: Deoband vs 'Maududiyat'

JUI had huge differences with Maulana Maududi and his party JI. It represented the Deobandi school of thought, which was a staunch opponent of Maulana Maududi and was critical of his ideology and his view and interoperation of Islamic history. So much so, it says that 'Maududiyat' was worse than socialism.²⁸ Deoband school of thought was a staunch critic of Maududi and gave fatwas against him on religious foundations. The fatwa scaled Maududi ideology as 'Masnooi Khakha' of religion (an artificial/superficial sketch of religion).²⁹ Maulana Ghulam Ghaus Hazarvi of JUP didn't endorse the party's decision to join UDF to be in alliance with JI as he did not consider Maulana Maududi a good Muslim. He also held that he was disrespectful to the companions of the prophets, especially the Caliph Usman. Hazarvi also believed that Maududi also brought innovation in Islam and mutilated the basic spirit of Islam. JUI was against Maududi from the beginning and the party regularly propagated against him. JUI led magazine Tarjamanul Islam remained quite vocal against JI, its ideology, strategies and literary fronts.³⁰ The magazine also onslaught Maududi's theological foundations and came quite hard on his religious and theological positions. It also attacked the very foundation of JI which proclaimed Islam as a 'Tehreek' a movement. JUI's Tarjammul Islam saw it quite critically and with a great suspicion and claimed that relegating Islam to a mere movement was the biggest mistake of JI.³¹

²⁷ Afshan Aziz, "Islamic Political Parties in Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis of Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan," *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2022): 977

²⁸ Pirzada Sayyid AS, *The Politics of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Pakistan, 1971-1977*. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 31.

²⁹ Maulana Muhammad Yousuf Ludhyanvi, *Tanqid Aur Haq Tanqid* (Sufi Muhammad Iqbal Hushyarpori, 1978), 4,

³⁰ Tarjamanul Islam, 4th March, 1966, Vol,9,no,8,31.

³¹ Tarjamanul Islam, 1st May 1958, Vol,1,no,50-51,2.

The volume of such writings is so huge that if the articles, comments, and excerpts from the speeches of the party leaders were put together, it would make a multi-volume book running into thousands of pages. There are ulema who did not consider Maulana Maududi a good Muslim in their writings and fatwas, among them were Mufti Muhammad Shafi, Maulana Zafar Ahmad Uthmani, Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori, Maulana Shamsul Haq Afghani, Maulana Khair Muhammad Jalandhari, Maulana Nasir ud Din Ghorghashtw, Maulana Abdul Haq, Maulana Muhammad Ishaq, Mufti Jamil Ahmad Thanwi, Maulana Syed Lal Husain Shah Bukhari, Maulana Abdul Hakim, Maulana Fazal Haq, Maulana Muhammad Anwar, Maulana Muhammad Ramdan.³² Mufti Kifayatullah, Maulana Husayn Ahmad Madni, Maulana Qari Muhammad Tayyab, Maulana Abdul Latif, Maulana Muhammad Zakir, Maulana Ahmad Saeed, Maulana Habibul Rahman Ludhianvi, Maulana.³³

Later Mualana Hazarvi group separated itself from JUI but couldn't get significant support due to Mufti Mehmood's influential politics. Hazarvi turned closer to socialism and held relatively flexible views on socialism. He also supported Bhutto and later during Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) movement, he opposed the PNA in election and declared those who voted for PNA as sinning and held that their prayers would be meaningless. That's a primarily a response to JI's Chief Mian Tufail's statement that voting for PNA was '*equivalent to thawab-remission of a hundred thousand years of prayers*'.³⁴

Some of the religious scholars of the JUI were not in favor of joining the alliance of UDF because JI was part of the alliance. Maulana Hazarvi considered that it was against the spirit of the ideology of their party and believed that JUI would operate separately from the alliance. However, Mufti Mehmood, who had a more political orientation and a reconciliatory attitude, tended to join UDF against the view of Maulana Hazarvi. Professor Ghafoor from JI was the secretary-general of the alliance. It was a serious blow to the hardline JUI leadership.³⁵

JUP and JI Clash: Reflection of Barelvi and JI's Divergences

JUP and JI also had serious clashes both political and religious and political differences were also rooted in religious differences. JUP like JUI was not ready to accept JI as it considered JI as an anti-Pakistan movement party. It considered JI's ideology against Islam. Maulana Ahmad Saeed Kazmi wrote in his *Maktobaat*

³² *Weekly Al-Jamiat* (Rawalpindi), January 18, 1974, 9.

³³ Pirzada Sayyid AS, *The Politics of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Pakistan, 1971-1977*. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 168.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 168.

³⁵ Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan and Aziz Ahmad, Statements in the House on an adjournment motion, *Debates*, vol. 3, no. 3 (May 26, 1973): 147–61.

(letters) that it was inevitable to save Muslims masses to save from the *fitna*³⁶ by referring Maulana Maududi's ideas and movement.³⁷

JUP was deeply paranoid by the rapid growth and acceptance of JI among the youth and urban middle classes. It always felt threatened by the mainstreaming of other religious parties such as JUI and JI. It perceived that the parties that opposed the idea of Pakistan during Pakistan movement were getting more spaces.³⁸ Since the Muslim League had been fragmented into pieces after the creation of Pakistan, JUP considered itself the true guardian of the ideology of Pakistan.³⁹ Also, when JI announced the Shaukat-i-Islam Day observed on 31 May 1970, to counter and diffuse the pressure of socialism, JUP also announced celebrating Rabi-ul-Awal 12, the birth date of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in Karachi. It was to equalize political power with JI. It should also be noted that the JUP leadership distanced itself from Shaukat-i-Islam Rally.⁴⁰ But interestingly, it also reflected a conflict within JUP since JUP Punjab leaders such as Qamarud din Sialvi, the Pir of Golra Sharif, Maulana Abdul Sattar Niazi, and Maulana Muhammad Husain Naeemi decided to celebrate it with JI's suggested date of May 3.⁴¹ The JUP challenged JI in the elections 1970 and contested on forty-two National Assembly seats. This is how it split the religious vote and benefitted Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).⁴²

The Sunni Conference was also convened and ulema and Mashaikh of the Barelvis school of thought attended the conference. A huge number of scholars under the leadership of Mualan Noorani attended the conference and strongly condemned socialism and *Maududiyyat*^{43,44} The second all Pakistan Sunni conference was also held, and thousands of delegates attended the conference which

³⁶ This word was used as a label to delegitimize and demonize to him as an agent of chaos and a threat to social order.

³⁷ Syed Ahmad Saeed Kazmi, *Maqālāt-e-Kazmi*, vol. 2 (Lahore: Maktab Shirkat-i-Hanafia, 1398 AH), 488.

³⁸ Both JUI and JI was critical of Jinnah's idea of Pakistan and his Muslim League

³⁹ Ghulam Sarwar Noorani. *Shah Ahmad Noorani* (Jehlum: Sunni Darul Ashaya Ghusia Mehria, Noorani Book Depot, 1973), 26.

⁴⁰ Mujeeb Ahmed, *Jamiyyat Ulama-I-Pakistan, 1948-1979*. (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1993), 62.

⁴¹ Hamida Fatima and Muhammad Shafique, "Intra-Party Factionalization in Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP): From Inception to 1977," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 59, no. 2 (2022), 148.

⁴² William Kesler Jackson, *A Subcontinent's Sunni Schism: The Deobandi-Barelvi Rivalry and the Creation of Modern South Asia*, PhD diss. (Syracuse University, 2013), 383.

⁴³ Maulana Maududi's views and his interpretation of Islam

⁴⁴ Zahid Ahmed, "Maulana Shah Ahmed Noorani Siddiqui: A Political Study" (PhD diss., Quaid-i-Azam University, Department of History, Spring 2015), 4.

demonstrated a huge power show to counter the influence of JI since it had a strong hold in Karachi.⁴⁵

While JUP decided to play an active role in opposition against Bhutto, it also had an option of joining the UDF but there was a huge debate among the cadres and leadership of the party whether to join an alliance with JI or not. It was a similar debate and conflict that JUI was facing on joining the UDF. Though JUP was offered ministries, Shah Ahmad Noorani decided to play his role in opposition. However, Maulana Noorani was aware of the fact that, “for those who dared oppose him (Bhutto) in the heyday of power, he had nothing but contempt.”⁴⁶

Maulana Noorani was vocal and a vibrant political leader and Bhutto tried his best to weaken his position within his party as he extended support for Sahibzada Faizal Hasan.⁴⁷ Three parliamentarians from Punjab Mehr Ghulam Haider Bharwana, Mian Muhammad Ibrahim Barq and Sahibzada Nazir Sultan extended their support to Sahibzada Faizal Hasan to challenge Maulana Shah Ahamd Noorani’s leadership within JUP. On the question of joining UDF there was clear division within the party as well. In a convention held at Khanewal where Shah Ahmad Noorani consolidated his power, the issue of joining UDF was also discussed and one of the leaders of JUP contented that it should not have joined UDF since JI was part of it.⁴⁸ Later when Maulana Noraani joined UDF, he defended UDF and his decision to join it. He also criticized Mualana Hazarvi for deviating from his party on the issue of UDF.

JUP always considered itself uniquely distinct from other religious parties and took credit for the service to Islam in the country. It boasted that Maulana Noraani did things which the old politicians with more than forty years experiences could not do. It downplayed the role of other religious parties which indicated the seriousness and nature of differences among these parties. One of the JUP led magazines claimed that though JI was part of the anti-Qadiani movement, it joined the movement later. The magazines claimed that JI gave a statement to distance itself from the movement after arrests. It also blamed that JI had four members in assembly, but it did not present a resolution on the Qadiani issue. It held that it was

⁴⁵ Zahid Ahmed, "The clarion call: Maulana Shah Ahmed Noorani and the last years of the United Pakistan, 1969-1971." *FWU Journal of Social Sciences* 12, no. 1 (2018): 293.

⁴⁶ Zahid Ahmed and Syed Akmal Hussain Shah, "Party Politics within Political Alliance: Case Study of Jaamiat-I-Ulema-I Pakistan’s Political Role In United Democratic Front (1973-76)" *Journal Of Historical Studies* 8, no. 1 (2022): 41

⁴⁷ Ibid, 49.

⁴⁸ Zahid Ahmed and Syed Akmal Hussain Shah, "Party Politics within Political Alliance: Case Study of Jaamiat-I-Ulema-I-Pakistan’s Political Role in United Democratic Front (1973-76)" *Journal of Historical Studies* 8, no. 1 (2022): 42.

the JUP which presented the issue in National Assembly and got it settled.⁴⁹ JUP took credit for knitting all political parties against Bhutto and turning PNA's alliance into 'Tehreek-i-Nizam-i-Mustafa'.⁵⁰ It still considered JI and its founder Maulana Maududi against Jinnah's Muslim League.⁵¹ Just like JUI, JUP also considers 'Maududiyyat' as greater threat to Ahl-i-Sunnat than socialism.⁵²

Difference between JUP and JUI: Barelvi vs Deoband

Similarly, there were nonnegotiable differences among JUP and JUI as both represented different sects that have historical rivalries with reference to Subcontinent. It was one of the most schism in the Muslim world which indeed was the most significant within split Sunni Islam.⁵³ The Barelvis and Deoband became part of the struggle for Islamic state soon after the creation of Pakistan but the Barelvis remained quite reluctant to join hand with Deoband as they felt that the Deobands were being granted undue position despite Barelvis had majority in the country.⁵⁴ It was also insecure on state's patronage to the Deoband school of thought and clearly expressed its anxieties.⁵⁵ JUI was uncomfortable with the patronage of government to Mualana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani led JUI, soon after the creation of Pakistan. JUP considered JUI an anti-Pakistan movement party and associated it with Jamiate Ulema-i-Hind. It saw JUI's later support of Muslim Leagued with suspicion and It considered it as against the interests of Ahl-e-Sunnat and detrimental to the people.⁵⁶ Even during the elections 1970 both JUP and JUI could not contest election jointly and the Deoband-Barelvi dynamic weakened the religious parties' political chances.⁵⁷ The JUP dubbed JUI as 'Congress ulema' and called them the followers of Nehru and Gandhi.⁵⁸ The division between these parties also surfaced when some of the members of JUI refused to vote for Shah Ahmad Noorani of JUP as a candidate of the Prime Minister against Bhutto. Noorani was nominated by the UDF against Bhutto, but JUI's three members did not vote for

⁴⁹ Malik Mehboob Rasool Qadri, ed., *Tameer Millat ke Liye Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan ki Siyasi Jadojehad* (International Ghausia Forum, 2012): 56-57.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 49-50

⁵¹ Ibid, 59.

⁵² Mujeeb Ahmed, *JamiyyatUlama-I-Pakistan, 1948-1979*. (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1993),52.

⁵³ William Kesler Jackson, *A Subcontinent's Sunni Schism: The Deobandi-Barelvi Rivalry and the Creation of Modern South Asia*, PhD diss. (Syracuse University, 2013),1.

⁵⁴ Ibid,305.

⁵⁵ Hamida Fatima and Muhammad Shafique, "Intra-Party Factionalization in Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP): From Inception to 1977," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 59, no. 2 (2022), 149.

⁵⁶ Syed Ahmad Saeed Kazmi, *Maqalat-e-Kazmi*, Part 2, Maktaba Ziaiyi, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, 1978, p.p 464-465.

⁵⁷ Ibid,383.

⁵⁸ Ibid,384.

Noorani against the party policy and voted for Bhutto.⁵⁹ Despite these deep, entrenched, and often hostile differences, these parties eventually converged politically by highlighting that political contingencies and survival imperatives could override even the most rigid ideological and sectarian divides.

Playing on Differences: PPP's Strategic Use of Divergences among the Religious Parties

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) strategically attempted to exploit differences among religious parties. It entrusted Maulana Kausar Niazi with a task aimed at creating divisions within the PNA by fueling sectarian tensions among its religious factions. Maulana Niazi challenged that if Mufti Mahmud prayed behind Maulana Noorani and vice versa, and if he and Maulana Maududi prayed at specific tombs of Allama Iqbal, Quaid-i-Azam, and Data Ganj Bakhsh Hajveri he would withdraw from contesting election. This proposition was supported by Bhutto. Mufti Mahmud claimed that he accepted the challenge but accused Maulana Niazi of retracting his offer.⁶⁰ Additionally, Mufti Naseerul Ijtihadi, a Shi'ite mujtahid, and sixteen other Shi'ite scholars cautioned Shi'ite voters against perceived ulterior motives of Sunni leaders like Mufti Mahmud, Maulana Noorani, and Maulana Maududi, advocating instead for support towards the PPP. However, another Shi'ite scholar, Sayyid Muhammad Razi, affirmed that Shi'ites had the freedom to align with any political party or candidate of their choice.⁶¹

These developments indicate that the PPP was not merely opposing the religious alliance politically, it was also attempting to strategically activate and deepen existing sectarian and ideological cleavages among religious parties. Bhutto and the PPP understood that the opposition alliance rested upon uneasy compromises among deeply divided political forces. Therefore, by exposing their internal contradictions and sectarian differences, the PPP attempted to fragment the alliance from within.

At a broader analytical level, these incidents reveal the inherent fragility of religious alliances during the 1970s. The alliances among religious parties were neither natural nor ideologically unified. The contingent political developments and political survival knitted them together for a shared but an immediate political agenda despite serious internal contradictions. The PPP's attempts to exploit divisions among the religious parties which further strengthen the central argument of this paper that religious parties joined together not because of religious and

⁵⁹ Zahid Ahmed and Syed Akmal Hussain Shah, "Party Politics within Political Alliance: Case Study of Jaamiat-I- Ulema-I-Pakistan's Political Role in United Democratic Front (1973-76)" *Journal of Historical Studies* 8, no. 1 (2022): 44

⁶⁰ Pirzada Sayyid AS, *The Politics of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Pakistan, 1971-1977*. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 169.

⁶¹ Ibid.

ideological convergence but because political contingencies and politics of survival compelled them to remain together against a common opponent. The common enemy and a quest for survival were the real binding forces of the alliance.

Collaboration among the Enemies against a Single Enemy: Politics of Survival against Authoritarianism

As discussed earlier the religious parties had irreconcilable differences and they were not willing to even accept each other's good Muslims and raised serious questions on each other's faiths. What led them to club together was a common enemy and very strong and powerful enemy. They made a strategic choice by setting aside their differences to counter Bhutto for their political survival. Primarily, it is because Bhutto had marginalized the religious opposition to an extent where they found no alternative but to set aside their differences to stand against him. Bhutto had almost pushed them to the brink where it was the only option to join hands together to fight against him. It was not a matter of ideological battle; it was rather a fight for survival. It was a politics of survival.

All parties in both UDF and PNA had serious ideological and political differences. Let alone the differences among the religious parties, even the other parties did not have ideological uniformity. Interestingly, in the case of PNA the religious parties took the lead and turned the movement into an overtly religious movement because all parties of PNA were convinced tacitly or openly that they were left only with this option against Bhutto.

Bhutto increasingly confronted the opposition with an iron hand. One of the most significant manifestations of this authoritarian turn was the formation of the Federal Security Force (FSF).⁶² This was extensively used to suppress political opposition.⁶³ It was used particularly against parties such as the National Awami Party (NAP) and Jamaat-i-Islami.⁶⁴ During the PNA movement, when Jamaat-i-Islami and its student wing Islami Jamiat-i-Talaba were protesting against Bhutto, both the FSF and police opened fire on demonstrators. Eighteen people lost their lives and nearly a hundred were injured. Javed Hashmi, one of the leaders of IJT, was arrested and subjected to torture.⁶⁵ Similarly, JUP alleged that its Training Convention was harassed by government authorities and the police.⁶⁶

Bhutto's rule was therefore harsh toward opposition forces across the ideological spectrum. One of the darkest incidents during his rule was the Liaquat

⁶² Tahir Kamran, *Democracy and governance in Pakistan* (Lahore: South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, 2008), 89.

⁶³ Niaz, *The Culture of power*, 157.

⁶⁴ Talbot, *Pakistan: a new history*, 106.

⁶⁵ Javed Hashmi, *"Haan Main Baghi Hoon"*. (Saghir Publishers, 2005).60. Mahbub Ul Haq, *The poverty curtain: Choices for the third world*. (Columbia University Press, 1976), 5.

⁶⁶ *Nawai-i-Waqt*, October 24, 1976

Bagh incident where an opposition rally was attacked and several people were killed. The government reportedly attempted to sabotage the rally because it did not want the rally to be successfully held.⁶⁷ At least seven people lost their lives and seventy-five were injured during the rally of the United Democratic Front at Liaquat Bagh.⁶⁸ Even Musawaat, widely regarded as a PPP mouthpiece, confirmed the deaths and injuries.⁶⁹

Bhutto also dismissed the NAP-JUI government in Baluchistan, and in response JUI resigned from the ministry in NWFP.⁷⁰ He further attempted to persuade some of the members of JUI to defect from their party in order to help the PPP to form a government in Baluchistan.⁷¹ Similar tactics were used when three JUI MNAs refused to vote for UDF's candidate Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani against Bhutto in an election of the Prime Minister. Their decision represented a direct deviation from party policy and reflected Bhutto's attempts to encourage floor-crossing within opposition ranks.

Interestingly, even secular and leftist forces eventually relied on religious parties for street mobilization against Bhutto. NAP, despite being a secular leftist party, remained a part of an alliance with religious parties because Bhutto had pushed opposition parties from both the left and the right to the brink. Such an unusual convergence reflected the level to which authoritarian pressure was reshaping politics in Pakistan during the 1970s.

Bhutto's rule increasingly curtailed democratic political space and imposed restrictions on the political activities of the opposition and hundreds of political opponents were arrested during his rule.⁷² Ironically, some of the earliest constitutional amendments introduced under Bhutto such the first, fourth, fifth and sixth curtailed freedom of expression and association, despite his earlier promises that the new constitutional order would eliminate dictatorship by any particular group.⁷³

The very students who helped him reach the pinnacle of power also faced difficult time during Bhutto's rule. The right-wing students who were leading the '*Bangladesh Na Manzoor Tehreek*'⁷⁴ led a protest in Lahore faced a ruthless show

⁶⁷ Jalib, Jalib Beeti by Habib Jalib, 121.

⁶⁸ New York Times 24 March, 1973.

⁶⁹ *Musawaat* 25 March, 1973.

⁷⁰ Dawn, 13 February, 1973.

⁷¹ *Imroz* 1 April, 1973.

⁷² Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and authoritarianism in South Asia*: (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 220.

⁷³ Al-Fateh, April 5, 1974, Vol. 4.no, 46, 3.

⁷⁴ Bengal, the East Pakistan got separated from Pakistan in 1971 and became Bangladesh. Some parties in Pakistan especially the JI and its students wing started a movement not accept Bangladesh as a new country. They launched a movement not to accept Bangladesh as a separate country.

of power by the PPP government of Punjab. Later on, the entire student body started protesting against the brutality of the Government against the students. The brutality against right-wing students triggered widespread protests across the political spectrum, with even left-wing students coming out in support of their right-wing counterparts. However, in a move that has been widely criticized, the authorities have responded to the protests with mass arrests, including the detention of many students who were exercising their right to peaceful assembly. In response, the legal community of Punjab had also taken to the streets in protest.⁷⁵

It demonstrates that increasing authoritarian pressure and political exclusion created conditions in which ideologically opposed groups were compelled to cooperate. This reinforces the central argument of the paper that alliance formation among religious and political actors in the 1970s was driven less by ideological convergence and more by political contingencies and the shared imperative of survival. Increasing authoritarianism and political exclusion created conditions under which ideologically divergent parties were compelled to come in a single alliance for their political survival. Religious parties, secular nationalists, and even segments of the Left increasingly found common cause against Bhutto's authoritarian rule. This once again validates that the alliances among religious and political parties during the 1970s were led less by ideological convergence and more by political contingencies, coercive apparatus of the government, and the shared need of survival.

Insecurity of Religious Parties: Competing Claim over Religious Constituencies

Another important reason that forced the religious parties to club together against Bhutto was not rooted solely in authoritarianism and political repression. It emerged from growing competition over religious constituencies and a contest of monopoly over religious legitimacy. Bhutto, despite being associated with socialism and relatively secular politics in several respects, relied heavily on religious idioms, Islamic symbolism, and populist religious rhetoric. This increasingly alarmed religious parties because Bhutto was not merely challenging them politically, he was also entering their traditional religious domain and challenging their exclusive claim over religious constituencies and monopoly over religious politics.

Bhutto frequently portrayed himself as a defender of Islam and a leader of the Muslim Ummah.⁷⁶ By presenting himself in such a manner and simultaneously portraying his opposition as hostile to the interests of the Muslim Ummah, he successfully marginalized segments of his right-wing opposition.⁷⁷ His rhetoric was politically significant because it enabled him to engage with the religious

⁷⁵ Lodhi, "Bhutto, the Pakistan Peoples Party", 154.

⁷⁶ The term commonly used for the Muslims across the globe as a one spiritual nation

⁷⁷ *National Assembly Debates*, vol. IV, no.1-9, 13 May 1977.297

constituencies that traditionally and perceivably belonged to religious parties. To a considerable extent, Bhutto succeeded in doing so through the strategic use of religious idioms and symbolism.

PPP's socialism itself was deeply embedded in Islamic idioms and concepts of Islamic equality 'Musawat-i-Muhammadi'.⁷⁸ Bhutto's election campaigns were deeply drenched with religious idioms and references. Even in the foundational documents of PPP, it was explicitly stated that 'Islam is our faith'.⁷⁹ However, under pressure from the religious parties that continuously accused him of propagating anti-Islamic socialism, Bhutto attempted to redefine socialism merely as an economic system rather than a complete code, as if socialism had no contradiction with Islam.

Similarly, Bhutto attempted to reinforce his Islamic credentials by taking political credit for the Islamic Conference and portraying himself as a leader of the Muslim Ummah.⁸⁰ He also derived substantial political mileage from declaring the Qadianis as non-Muslim, a move that strengthened his position among lower middle-class, rural, and religious voters and weakened the propaganda of religious parties against him. During the later years of his rule, especially during the PNA movement, Bhutto increasingly adopted religious populism more overtly as the attacks of religious parties on him intensified.

Ironically, both Bhutto and the religious parties pushed each other toward increasingly extreme positions. Their political struggle gradually transformed into a contest over religious legitimacy in which Islamic symbolism, rhetoric, and emotional religious appeals became central political tools. Bhutto was repeatedly compelled to defend himself against accusations that his socialism was anti-Islamic. In response, he increasingly emphasized the Islamic idioms and elevated Maulana Kausar Niazi, a former JI leader, to significant political positions in order to counter the propaganda of religious political parties and strengthen the Islamic legitimacy of the PPP.⁸¹

Bhutto's PPP dubbed the alliance of PNA as an anti-Pakistan alliance.⁸² Bhutto by referring to the role of religious parties during the Pakistan Movement mocked that the supporters of 'United India' could not implement Islam.⁸³ The Nusrat, a PPP led magazine, frequently wrote against the religious parties, especially the JI. It

⁷⁸ PPP came up with this word as synonymous to Islamic socialism, primarily to avoid a blatant criticism of religious segments on socialisms dubbing it anti religion.

⁷⁹ Pakistan People's Party. Election Manifesto 1970.

⁸⁰ *National Assembly Debates*, vol. IV, no.1-9, 13 May 1977, 297

⁸¹ Philip Edward Jones, *The Pakistan people's party: Rise to power* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 281.

⁸² Musawaat, January 31, 1977

⁸³ Musawaat, January 15, 1977

portrayed JI's anti-Muslim League stance during the Pakistan Movement as anti-religious.⁸⁴ It challenged the very foundations and narratives of religious parties not as a secular dismissal but through religious arguments. The narrative of the Nusrat was powerful enough to push JI into a defensive position, forcing it to justify its stance during the Pakistan Movement.⁸⁵ Similarly, Maulana Kausar Niazi announced that a new Ministry of Religious Affairs would be established and Islamic provisions would no longer remain symbolic gestures, as had allegedly been the case under previous 'Islam Pasand' governments.⁸⁶ Such statements directly challenged the traditional constituencies of religious parties because they suggested that PPP itself could implement Islamic policies more effectively than religious actors.

Religious parties, however, had historically viewed religious rhetoric and Islamic symbolism as their exclusive political domain. From the very beginning, these parties mobilized support through religious idioms, although their styles and sectarian orientations. In many ways, the political contest gradually evolved into a populist and a symbolic struggle between Islamic and allegedly anti-Islamic forces.⁸⁷ Religious parties therefore perceived Bhutto's religious populism as a direct encroachment upon their political and ideological constituencies. They traditionally considered themselves the exclusive representatives of religious politics and maintained an exclusive claim over religious narratives and constituencies. Bhutto's increasing reliance on Islamic symbolism, his portrayal of himself as a defender of the Muslim Ummah, his introduction of Islamic provisions, and his attempts to portray religious parties as anti-Islamic deeply unsettled religious actors. In some instances, Bhutto employed religious populism even more aggressively than religious parties themselves. This intensified the insecurity of religious parties and pushed them closer toward strategic cooperation in order to collectively counter Bhutto's growing influence over religious constituencies.

Thus, the contest over religious constituencies and Islamic legitimacy became one of the most significant factors behind alliances among the contradicting religious parties. Their alliances cannot be understood merely as ideological alliance among religious parties, It was rather shaped by a competition over religious legitimacy, monopoly over religious politics and symbolic ownership of religion within the public sphere.

Conclusion

Religious parties are frequently perceived as a monolithic entity in Pakistani politics particularly with reference to the politics of 1970s. This breeds academic

⁸⁴ Nusrat, November 16, 1969, no.60, 3.

⁸⁵ Nawai-i-Waqt, October 1, 1976

⁸⁶ Dawn, 8 December, 1973.

⁸⁷ Ahmad, *Jam'iyyat 'Ulama-i-Pakistan*.

and analytical mistakes because it ignores the internal nuances and inherent dialectics within religious political parties. These nuances are crucial for understanding in the formation of alliances among religious parties, alliances that have historically been misrepresented as naturally cohesive and ideologically uniform, portraying as Bhutto vs the religious parties. This paper concludes that alliances of the religious parties during the 1970s were neither ideologically nor religiously monolith. They were contingent and context driven led by the politics of survival.

The politics of the 1970s in Pakistan is usually relegated to a clichéd binary between a supposedly secular Bhutto and a monolith right-wing religious parties. Such interpretations assume that the religious parties during 1970s constituted a monolithic entity. However, this paper demonstrated that the religious opposition itself was internally fragmented and divided by deep sectarian, theological, political, and historical tensions. The paper highlighted the divergences among JUI, JUP, and JI and examined how these parties frequently questioned one another's ideological legitimacy and religious positions. Despite these divisions, Bhutto's authoritarianism, suppression of opposition, political marginalization opposition parties, and appropriation of religious rhetoric created a common political threat that compelled religious parties to form an alliances against Bhutto. Religious parties strategically suspended many of their differences in order to challenge a political adversary whose actions threatened not merely their electoral prospects but also their ideological relevance and religious constituencies. Their alliances were contingent political choices rather than manifestation of ideological convergence.

The alliances of the UDF and the PNA validate how religious parties navigated their internal differences in order to pursue broader political objectives. These movements also involved cooperation with secular and liberal parties, showing that political survival can transcend ideological and sectarian divides. For the parties involved, the struggle against Bhutto became larger than ideology, it was a matter of survival.

The paper concludes that political spaces in Pakistan are flexible and contingent, allowing even deeply divergent groups to form alliances when confronted with existential threats. It corrects an analytical misconception by showing that the right-wing religious parties in Pakistan are not monolithic; they are fragmented, nuanced, and capable of strategic coordination when political survival is at stake. It concludes that political alliances in Pakistan, especially among religious parties, are shaped less by ideological uniformity and more by contingency, strategy, and the imperative of survival, providing a new lens for analyzing political cooperation among seemingly contrary forces.

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